

Saint Joseph's Virtues



by Father Albert Power

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Joseph Most Just

Souls become holy as flowers grow to beauty - by basking in sunshine: and the sunshine of the spiritual world flows radiantly from the Heart of Jesus, the Man-God. Now during years of his life Saint Joseph lived in daily contact with Him who is the Source of all justice and all holiness. What a privilege that was! Yet Jesus has devised a plan whereby we can share in that same privilege if we choose. For on us the sunshine of grace streams radiantly from Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.



To understand Christ's great plan in instituting the Blessed Sacrament must be the object of our constant efforts. We must come ceaselessly to Him that He may instruct us in His own Divine Wisdom. His Plan is a hidden, mysterious one. The world scorns to accept His teaching, just as the Jews in Capharnaum refused to listen to Him when he said they must eat His Flesh; and even some of the disciples turned away and refused to walk with Him any longer. So, too, nowadays, the Blessed Sacrament is the dividing line between the true friends of Jesus and His opponents.

The Beatific Vision

The Blessed Sacrament is to us on earth what the actual visible Presence of God is to the blessed in Heaven. In Heaven we shall gaze on God as He is, face to face. The tormenting veil that hides Him from us here below shall be

torn aside: the cloud that conceals so effectually His Being shall be removed, and the splendor of the Godhead shall be revealed to us. Then we shall know Him as He is, the infinite, unimagined, uncreated Beauty. The perfection of that Essence is so wonderful that God Himself gazes upon It everlastingly and is never satiated. God's eternal life is simply the act of contemplating and loving His own infinite Beauty.

Think of what that Ocean of Being must be, that perfect Essence that exists by its own very nature! To exist is God's Essence, the very notion of His Being. We exist now; a little while ago we were nothing. Our hold on existence is precarious, our life is a long struggle with elements of dissolution that are hurrying us to the grave; not so with God. And presently we shall see Him as He is, shall gaze upon Him who exists by His very Nature! And when the soul is admitted to that Vision, its life is to gaze upon it undistractedly; all its joy and strength will come from that Vision, and from the love it begets in the soul.

Source of Our Life

Now the Blessed Sacrament is, in this world, the source of all our good. From It streams forth the river of life to save men from the death of sin. We live by gazing on Him, by feeding on Him, by keeping ever in touch with Him. And the closer our union, the more incessant our recourse to Him, the more intense shall be our supernatural life.

Hence we see the marvellous spiritual activity of the Saints, just because they sought Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament so fervently. He was everything to them, His Presence filled up their lives so that there was no room for created attractions that might lead to sin.

"I am the Vine." Jesus Himself constantly speaks of this dependence on Himself as the source of life.

"I am the Vine and you are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the Vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me." The rich, luxuriant grapes are the result of nourishing sap flowing from the vine into the branches. So the rich fruits of virtue are the result of the sap of divine grace flowing generously into our souls from the Vine of the Blessed Sacrament.

In Saint John (chapter 6) Jesus insists, over and over again, on this great truth: "The bread of God is that which cometh down from Heaven and giveth life to the world."

"I am the bread of life: He that cometh to Me shall not hunger, he that believeth in Me shall never thirst."

By our very nature we are ever seeking for happiness. The soul is a restless, craving substance that needs something besides itself for its satisfaction. Just as the body imperiously demands food and drink, and must have them or perish; so the soul demands its food and must have it or be for ever in torture indescribable. The fierce energy of the hungering and thirsting soul, baulked for ever of peace and happiness, constitutes the supreme torment of hell.

Now Jesus came to still that hunger, to quench that thirst by giving to our souls the Bread of Life, the Waters of Salvation. One may well say that food which can fully satisfy an immortal soul, and still its cravings for ever, must be food indeed; the waters that can satisfy the thirst of every soul must truly be Waters of life. Yes, assuredly the soul needs a wondrous food, but the food Jesus offers is wonderful beyond the wildest dreams of fancy, since it is God Himself.

Joseph Most Pure

Purity of heart is the result of intense love of God. Sin (which dims the soul's purity) is an inordinate seeking of created things, a choosing of some gratification which we know God's law forbids. The soul that loves God intensely will ever seek to do His will as perfectly as possible. "He that loveth me keeps my commandments."

Now Saint Joseph's soul was ablaze with intense love of God. As a result of the extraordinary graces bestowed upon him to fit him for his high office he desired only the perfect accomplishment of God's Will. Hence he led a life of marvellous purity - walking ever in God's presence, a man of ceaseless prayer and unbroken union with God.

We too, if we would achieve purity of soul, must seek to walk in God's presence.

Why Saints?

The difference between Saints and other people is this: *they are all intent upon God and His work - others are intent upon creatures.* The Saints cry out to us: "Seek God purely and directly, and He will help thee to do His work. Climb above the blinding mists of human cares, keep ever gazing into the heaven of God's Being, and light will come.

How can one help others unless one has climbed the heights and knows where the upward path is to be found? An Alpine guide must have trodden the track to the summit many a time himself."

This silent inward quest of God must go on steadily all through life in fair weather and foul. Christ has redeemed us and restored us to our rights, but He has left to each

individual the business of seeking the prize of life by his own exertions. And the only explanation of the strange experience that we call life is this: that it is intended to be a quest of God. When we realise this, then life becomes intelligible.

Jesus Himself had no other business in life. He too was a Knight Errant in quest of souls. And yet in seeking souls He is really seeking God, since He is seeking to restore the ruined image of God in sinful souls. It is not the mere soul as such that Jesus wants, but rather God in the soul: to see His Father's image kindled to living activity in regenerated souls, to see His Holy Spirit busy there, is the whole ambition of His Sacred Heart. His Heart, like the heart of every Saint (He is the King of Saints, the first and chiefest and grandest of all the Saints) is set simply and intensely on God. He fulfilled in a way impossible to any other creature God's spacious command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and all thy mind."

Christ's Sacred Heart

So Jesus loved with all the strength of His Heart, with all the intense devotion of His spotless Soul, with all the power of His perfect Nature, with all the single-minded energy of His most perfect Will, and He loved under the influence of the fulness of all grace. His human intellect and will were perfected, elevated, penetrated by grace poured out upon Him in the most lavish abundance. All the fervor and fire and devotion of the Saints, all the intensity of the Cherubim were His. His eyes were ever gazing Godwards. He sought to find God everywhere in Creation, above all in that most perfect mirror of Divinity, the immortal soul. When the soul is lit by grace Jesus sees reflected therein the one Object of His desires. But alas, as He gazes round this world of ours and

looks to find His Father's image, He meets on every hand the blank, miserable emptiness of sin: He sees coldness and wretchedness where the fire of God's love should be blazing: He finds God's enemy, the hideous personification of evil, actually enthroned in His Father's chosen temples.

God's Palace

Souls were created to be God's resting place; each soul is meant to be *Sedes Sapientiae*, a Throne for Infinite Wisdom to rest upon; an Ark of the Covenant where he may manifest His Presence; a House of Gold to be filled with His precious bridal gifts; a Sanctuary of holiness, the very image and reproduction of the Infinite Beauty; and lo! Christ finds therein too often only noisome foulness, finds God cast forth from His own house and God's enemy, in full possession. What a bitter, crushing misery for His Heart! And Christ's work is to restore God to His rightful place. And because He more intensely and exclusively and perfectly than any other man sought God in the souls of men, therefore is His power and influence greater than any other man's. A priest is consequently (as being alter Christus) a man seeking God in the souls of men; and when he finds Him not, when he finds God's image destroyed, then the priest sets to work to restore it - to rekindle that lost image. This explains the priest's activity in preaching and administering the sacraments, which are means for restoring God to the soul.

And just as Christ's quest for God in the human soul explains His strange life of suffering, humiliation, abandonment, and His bitter Passion and Death, so our quest of God in souls will explain our sufferings also; since the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die before it brings forth fruit.

Joseph Most Prudent

Prudence is one of the supreme virtues of a Ruler. The Patriarch Joseph was sold by his brethren into slavery, but through the special grace and providence of God rose to be the Chief Minister of Egyptian Pharaoh, in which high office he displayed such prudence that the king gave him complete charge of his household - with authority to dispense as he pleased the royal property. Now he was the prototype of the other and greater Joseph who also by special grace and providence of God rose from a humble station to be the Master of God's own household - with such authority vested in his hands as was never before entrusted to any living creature - whether man or angel: authority, namely, to direct, guide and instruct the Child that was God Himself and to determine His actions and His mode of life.

God's Obedience

God came on earth to teach us humility, and He began by practising it Himself. To do this He wished to be submissive - to bow Himself down in entire obedience beneath the sway of His own creature: and the person chosen to act as His Superior - to wield authority over Him - was Joseph the Carpenter of Nazareth.

What a position it was! What marvellous prudence it called for! But Joseph acquitted himself well. And what was the secret of his success? Just this, he "cast his care upon the Lord" and the Lord provided for him. He kept in close touch with God by prayer, and all went well.

The Divine Child who was his charge was also his Instructor. The Child in whose Presence he lived, with whom he came into daily contact, was the Source of all his strength.

So it is with us. We too are guardians of Jesus - His fortunes are in our hands. But He Himself is the Light that will guide

us in discharging our duty.

For He is still living in our midst in the Blessed Sacrament; and the immediate personal service He wants from us is adoration. We adore Jesus because He is God: and the fact that He is God is clearly shown forth in the Resurrection.

The Visits of Jesus

For us the apparitions of the risen Christ are our daily Communion. In those fleeting visits Jesus Himself comes in person, with all His glorious qualities and searches our souls to see if we are ready for His gifts. What are the dispositions He seeks to find in us? What is the attitude of soul that attracts His gaze and makes Him bestow His treasures upon us? In other words what qualities in us will give pleasure to His Sacred Heart and so make reparation to Him for the sinfulness and tepidity of others? The answer is supplied by the meetings recorded in the Gospel between Jesus risen from the dead and His friends. And we shall see that the souls that pleased Him most were the souls most filled with faith and with love.

Mary Magdalen

How Mary Magdalen made amends by her fervor for the contempt heaped upon Him by His enemies! She is standing near the empty tomb weeping bitterly because His Sacred Body is gone; His enemies must have stolen it and are perhaps desecrating it. So she is standing there desolate and weeping, because Jesus is being dishonored. That is a picture of the Christian soul kneeling in reparation before the Tabernacle, filled with sorrow because Christ's enemies treat Him so badly. Such a soul realises deeply who He is. She has knelt by the crib of Bethlehem with the Magi and adored Him as her God: she has followed the child Jesus

from the streets of Nazareth to the Temple in Jerusalem: has stopped and listened as Mary put her pleading question to Him: "My child, why hast thou treated us in this manner? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." She has watched Him working miracles, multiplying the loaves and feeding the thousands: has seen Him lay His hand on the stricken lepers and restore them to health: has watched Him raise the widow's son to life, and call forth Lazarus from the tomb. Thus in daily meditation she has lived with the Prophet of Nazareth, and like Peter and John she has come to understand the sublime truth of His divine Personality.

The Central Fact

She has tasted the meaning of the central fact of the world's history, that Jesus, the Boy of Nazareth, is actually the living God come down amongst us: that this Man who is practising the trade of a carpenter, shaping and moulding the wood to human uses, is the Artisan who shaped the universe; that He it is who has moulded and fashioned the stars and set them jewel-like in their places. And so she kneels before Him, as Mary Magdalen knelt, drinking in His words and spending her life gladly in the supreme work of adoration. The great light has come and filled her soul, the great truth is her possession, that Jesus Christ is a Divine Person: that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob who led the Israelites through the desert, who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave the tables of the law, who rained manna in the desert and caused the living water to burst from the rock, that He who is supreme Ruler and Master and Lord of the Universe is actually there before her, speaking to her, listening to her, gently shaping her soul by His teachings.

"The World Knew Him Not."

And then she sees how this great fact of the Divinity of Jesus is unrecognised by the world. "He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not." That is why her tears flow and her heart is filled with sorrow, because He is treated so coldly and scornfully by the world that He came to save. Such souls filled with intense faith and intense love are the resting places where Jesus finds comfort and consolation. Hence we see Him coming to thank Mary Magdalen for her tears. Just one little word He speaks. He calls her by her name, "Mary," and behold, heaven is in her soul. How will it be when Jesus calls us by name? What will it be to hear Him speak to us in tender affectionate terms? Will not that make amends for all the bitterness of our exile?

Joseph Most Courageous

Joseph arose and took the Child and His mother by night and retired into Egypt. - *Matthew 2:14*

What courage he had! A man entrusted with a very valuable diamond to bring it safely across the sea will feel the responsibility of his charge. Saint Joseph was entrusted with God's Royal Diamond, and was told to guard it well, and, lo! scarce has it come into his keeping but robbers are on the track; they have heard of the booty and are devising measures to seize it. A royal despot with armies at his back is seeking the life of the Child; and Saint Joseph is bidden to protect it. What a responsibility! The life of the world's Saviour, the life of supreme importance for the universe put into my keeping (so might Joseph reflect), and I, a weak, helpless man! What can I do against Herod?

And he is told to cross the desert in flight. That desert is a terrible one for strong men to face; Joseph must convey the

delicate Mother and the new-born Babe across it! What faith, what lion-hearted courage the man had!

Coming of the Magi

This cruel trial followed the visit of the Magi. May we not think that God arranged that visit in order to prepare Mary and Joseph for the flight to Egypt? The example of heroic trust and fidelity to God's call shown by these Wise Men from the East, taught them how to face the long weary journey so suddenly imposed upon them.

Perfume of the East

What a wonderful Oriental charm there is about this story of the Magi - those foolish Easterners coming all this way to see and adore a little new-born Babe! It is like the foolishness of modern Catholics travelling round the globe to pray at a shrine. This was the first pilgrimage in the history of Christianity; the starting point of that system of travel for purposes of prayer and worship which has gone on steadily ever since down to the days of Lourdes and Lisieux.

We may, I suppose, take for granted that the good folk of Jerusalem thought it a very foolish enterprise indeed. "We have come (quoth the travellers) to adore the new-born King of the Jews." No mere money-making expedition this! They have come not to receive, but to give. Foolish men! Yet foolish with the wisdom of God - for "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

"We Have Seen His Star."

And when asked how they were impelled to undertake this adventure, their answer is: "We have seen His star in the East." That again opens up vistas. "His star?" Is the Master of the stars then guiding them by a special sign? Here we are

already on the track of the mystic Saints - led on in their adventurous climbing by God's miraculous light.

Now you will notice that in the course of this enterprise they have to come into pretty rough contact with the world and its spirit. Their path to Jesus lies through the tumultuous city and wicked court of King Herod. There they must face bitter scorn and sarcastic questioning, and must have an interview with Herod himself, and be ready to satisfy his enquiries. This King Herod will use every effort to destroy the Baby Jesus, and will fail. But thirty years later his son, Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, will meet Jesus face to face, will dress Him in the white robe of a fool, mock Him, and send Him back to Pilate and to death.

Life's Pilgrimage

In this pilgrimage of the Magi we may note two characteristics which also mark the pilgrimage of every soul that sees the gently shining star of grace and rises up to follow it and find the newborn King. First, the length and loneliness and difficulties of the journey, with but a faint and distant star to guide them; secondly, the rough encounter with the worldly spirit and its principles that tend to turn them back.

In the first place then you must - at least in spirit - leave home and friends and the comforts of the East and journey westwards to find Jesus. This means "detachment," a resolute spirit that is determined to sacrifice everything in order to find Him. He is the treasure hidden in the world - the precious pearl known to few; you the merchant setting forth on life's great adventure to secure the treasure for yourself. That is why a "religious vocation " is such an intensely interesting thing. It is a great bid for a splendid prize - it means entering the lists to tilt at a tournament

where Saints and Angels and God Himself are spectators of the combat. "We are become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (1 Cor. iv., 9).

Was It a Dream?

Then in the second place you must face the roar and tumult of worldliness. You must pass through Jerusalem and hear its questionings and mark its attitude of hostility. Then resolutely you must throw off its shackles, get out again into the open where the star is blazing, and follow it as it guides you to your goal.

During their sojourn in Jerusalem the Magi may well have been tempted to think that perhaps, after all, they were on a fool's errand - seeking a mysterious child of whom none could give them tidings. Was it all a fantastic dream? Were it not better to drop this strange quest once and for all, settle down like ordinary people and enjoy life? Had they listened to the tempter's voice they would never have seen Mary and Joseph and the Babe.

But they persevered. And when they actually found the Child and fell down to adore Him and offer their gifts, how little they thought of the fatigue and worries and disappointments of the long journey! All was swallowed up in the ecstasy of finding Him at long last. For now they knew that the star had not deceived them; now they knew the great God was their Friend and had actually whispered to them His greatest secret, viz., that He was come Himself as a living man into the world to accept their homage and their gifts and their proffer of loyal service.

When God Speaks

So will it be with us. We may often be sore beset with harassing temptations that seem to frustrate all our efforts

to follow God's call. But these bitter hours will often be the prelude to a great discovery - when God's hand lifts the veil and allows us to glimpse the Babe with His Mother, to taste how sweet He is; and to know - at least in a dim way - something of the unutterable happiness which the full knowledge and possession of Him will one day confer upon our poor souls.

Joseph Most Obedient

The stone which the builder rejected lo! it has become the keystone of the arch. - *Psalms 117:22*

Christ has conquered the world by His Obedience. And His earthly Guardian and Helper Saint Joseph must resemble Him by the perfect practice of this difficult and fundamental virtue.

Obedience is the surest test of humility: and on humility all Christian virtue must rest.

The Name of Jesus has been glorified just because He was so deeply abased; and we can learn something of the part obedience is to play in Christ's scheme, by studying a little - with the aid of Saint Paul - the story of the exaltation of the Holy Name.

The Name of Jesus

The Jews rejected Christ; they tried Him and found Him wanting. He would not fit into the building which they were planning. Caiaphas, the High Priest, had a certain vision of happiness in his mind's eye; his forecast of the political and religious future of Jerusalem demanded that he should select carefully the materials of his building, and behold! Jesus of Nazareth did not fit into his plan. So he assembled his

fellows to examine Christ and they found Him wanting and cast Him away.

The Rejected Stone

And see what has happened. This rejected stone has become the very keystone of the arch supporting God's house! The humbled Jesus has been so elevated by God that He is the centre-piece of creation, and the whole universe bows in adoration at mention of His name. He climbed to His seat of majesty beside His Father's throne along the steep and craggy paths of bitter shame. He was humbled to the cruel and awful depth of being, crucified as a malefactor; therefore hath God exalted Him and given Him a name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend in heaven on earth and in hell; and all must do Him homage and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus shares the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

Christ's Exaltation

On account of His obedience God exalted Him; and this exaltation consists in the Glory and Majesty of Jesus being recognised throughout God's created dominions. This recognition is secured in this world by the supernatural gift of Faith. God bestows the gift of Faith and through it men's eyes are opened to recognise who Jesus is. God so illumined men's mind about the Holy Name that they recognised in It a Name more sacred than any other, so that they fall down in adoration at mention of It; and they see so clearly who He is, that they confess (by acts of faith) that Jesus Christ is the Lord, thereby giving glory to the Father.

Fiat Lux

This flood of light, called Faith, which came into men's souls is the result of Christ's humiliations, and in particular of His

act of obedience in submitting to death by crucifixion. When God first said "Fiat lux" the material life of the universe began, and when God said "Fiat lux" in the spiritual universe, the supernatural life of souls began. That "Fiat" was merited by Jesus alone. Hence He is "the head of the corner" in that spiritual building of which souls are the constituent stones or elements.

Now the central revelation of this Faith is the supreme position of Jesus, the fact that the man Jesus is at God's right hand, sharing the glory of God Himself. And the result of this revelation is the worship of Jesus by all creatures, both by external marks of adoration (bending the knee) and by internal homage (expressed in words, which are the interpreters of thought). Hence Saint Paul continues: "Wherefore with fear and trembling work out your salvation for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish." (Philippians 2:13)

Saint Paul Saint Paul lived habitually in the world of grace; and his thoughts, interests, aspirations are all in that elevated supernatural sphere, the interior world of the soul as illuminated, influenced and directed by God's action. God Himself is the light of this interior world. Hence when Paul speaks of the exaltation of the Name of Jesus, he means that Jesus' Name is glorified in men and angels by the light given to them by God, which light is given solely in virtue of the merits of Jesus. We do not perhaps dwell enough upon this fact that Jesus is for us the source and origin of the supernatural world, who merited (by His death) the creation of that new universe which we call the world of Grace. Grace is the new life that sprang up from the death of this Man-God. Just as the golden wealth of wheat in autumn springs from the corruption of the seed committed to earth in the spring time, so this golden fruit of supernatural life springs from the death of the heavenly seed that was in like manner

committed to the black loneliness and humiliation of the tomb.

Joseph Most Faithful

If any man loves me he will keep my word. - *John 14:23*

Saint Joseph was the Foster Father in whose arms the Child Jesus often rested - so that the divine Heart was beating very close to his own; who then could better understand the law of Charity which was the centre and essence of Christ's teaching? Who more faithful in carrying out that law to the full?

Service

Jesus has taught us both by word and example that the highest use we can make of our faculties is to consecrate them to God in the service of others. Just as He, the greatest of men, came to render service and finally to die in discharging His duty to the race - falling stricken on the battlefield in the war against sin and the powers of evil; so He taught us also to spend our lives in rendering service. And the highest mark of esteem and affection He can bestow upon you is to give you ample opportunity for laboring effectively to help your fellow-creatures in their needs of body or soul.

On a certain occasion Jesus asked His disciple, Saint Peter, three times over this important question: "Simon, son of John, dost thou love Me?" And when Peter, making protestation of his love, cried: "Master, Thou knowest that I love Thee," after each repetition Jesus said to him: "Feed My lambs" or "Feed My sheep." That is, if you love Me then work for the souls that I love - the sheep and lambs of that great flock of which I am the Faithful Shepherd.

In like manner, since Jesus loves His dear Foster Father so well, He gives him endless opportunities of helping souls, and Saint Joseph carries out the work by promoting the activity of God's grace in the interior life of those that appeal to him for help. He obtains for them the gift of prayer. So the Saints testify, especially his great client, Saint Teresa of Avila, who ascribes to his intercession all the great and special graces of her life.

Christ's Fellow-Workers

It is a part of Jesus' great plan for the promotion of charity to do a great deal of His work through others. He employs His friends as His helpers. So we have the Sacramental system, whereby, though Jesus Himself is the chief agent, since it is He that really baptises, confirms, cleanses from sin and feeds the soul - still, He works through secondary agents, and so His servants become His immediate coadjutors and helpers in conveying God's richest gift, namely, sanctifying grace, to the souls that He loves.

When the Apostles went forth preaching and working miracles, it was Jesus Himself who stirred men's hearts or cured their bodies - but He did so through the instrumentality of the voices and hands, or even the touch of the garments of His preachers. In like manner Jesus shares His work with His dear friend, Saint Joseph, and Saint Joseph becomes the Patron, the helper, the promoter of the life of Jesus in our souls.

A Visit to Nazareth

Had you lived in Nazareth and been a friend of Joseph, he would have spoken to you about the Divine Child, encouraged you to come to visit Him, calmed your fears, removed your shyness. He would have told you of His

charms and the delights of His conversation; and so would have done much to promote your friendship with his Foster Son.

And who (except Mary) knew the Child better or could have spoken more eloquently about Him?

And you - if you were wise - would have listened gladly to this inspiring talk of the village Carpenter and would gladly accept an invitation to visit his house and become a friend of that family where such fragrance of virtue and holiness habitually reigned. So your intimacy with Jesus would develop; your love for Him would daily increase with growing knowledge and understanding of Him. But you would never forget that you were in Joseph's home and that he was Master of the household.

Even so, we must still honor Saint Joseph in the Household of the Catholic Church. We wish to seek, day after day, the companionship of the Divine Child in His Mystic Home on the Altar. Yet are there many obstacles to be overcome - many difficulties that beset our approach to the Royal Presence. Christ's Tabernacle is set up in the midst of a noisy distracting world. Alongside the crowded highways of the world's traffic He has pitched His tent - and, when we would visit Him, then, too often, alas! the din and cares of the fleeting world follow us and spoil our attention. Our minds are unstable - our hearts often caught in the meshes of the glittering counter-attractions of life. We sorely need a friend - one who is himself deeply filled with the spirit of adoration (the only becoming attitude in which to enter this Sacred Presence) to take us by the hand, to calm our thoughts, to turn our hearts quietly to heavenly things and dispose us to come to Jesus and give our whole attention to Him, to listen to His instructions, to accept His inspirations, to allow Him to do His purifying, transforming work in our souls.

A Friend at Court

And what friend more suitable for this work than Joseph, the Master of Jesus? If Joseph was found faithful in setting God's household in order, will he not be able to put the household of your soul in order, that you may receive Jesus fittingly? It was Joseph's duty in Nazareth to shield the Child and His Mother, from all that might be injurious, undesirable, unbecoming for them - from every influence that could mar the peace and happiness of their lives. It is still his duty to shield the friends of Jesus from the storms, temptations and evil influences that are calculated to injure them. His prayer helps unceasingly to establish firmly the Kingdom of Jesus in their souls.

Mirror of Patience

Saint Joseph's soul is a Mirror reflecting the patience and gentleness of the Heart of Jesus; and through devotion to him we are brought into ever closer contact with that Divine Heart and partake more fully of its inexhaustible riches.

It is the living human Heart of Jesus that is the object of our worship. We speak of His Heart not merely to signify that we choose a heart as a symbol (as soldiers might choose a heart or a hand or a sword to decorate their banner) but we wish to direct our attention in a special way to the Heart of Jesus as the organ of His human life and love, and also as a visible symbol of the spiritual reality called His love. We wish to signify hereby the tenderness, the human gentleness and kindness of the love of Him who is God. Christ's love is divine, even His human love; because it is the love of a divine Person. Just as it is a divine Person who shed His blood and died on the cross for our salvation, so it is a divine Person that loves through the organs and faculties of the Man Jesus. A divine Person is interested in us, is occupied

about us, is solicitous for our welfare, but in a thoroughly human way.

A Divine Lover

It is God then whose love we are thinking about. But lest we forget how infinitely gentle and tender that love is, Jesus will have us turn our attention to His Heart, the human material organ and visible symbol of that love. The heart plays an even fuller and more prominent part in the language and thought of the Jews than amongst us, since it is the word used habitually to denote not only the seat of the affections but also "soul," "will," and "organ of thought."

Now the thoughts and affections of Jesus are the purest and sublimest of all created thoughts and affections, and their home or origin is the sacred sanctuary of Christ's Heart. That is the glorious, divine spring whence flows the stream of purity and fragrance which we call the love of Jesus.

As the river flowing through the sin-laden city has its source in the lofty mountain where the stainless water leaps freshly from the rock: so the river of life which is the love of the Man-God has its origin in the mystic mountain heights of the Heart of Jesus - the Heart that is elevated to the glory of hypostatic union with God. It is God's Heart. Think then what the love will be that has its home in that Heart! Think how pure, tender, undefiled, elevated that love will be!

Human Love Divine

Just as Jesus, though man, is a divine Person and in Him our humanity is elevated to an infinite dignity, and with Him we are lifted up into a divine region where we become in a sense deified (we call this our "supernatural elevation"): so the love of Jesus, the human love of His Heart, is a divine thing because it is the love of a Person who is God. Hence

human love is deified in Christ's love. To realise this and to feed our souls on this great truth kindles devotion to His Sacred Heart.

The Sacred Humanity of Jesus will make us fragrant by communicating its treasures of grace to us. It is the Man Jesus that has merited for us; He is the Vessel of Grace, filled to overflowing with choicest gifts and communicating His treasures to us without stint. The Man Jesus it was that wept for us in Bethlehem and shed His Blood for us in Gethsemani and on Calvary, and by His human death, by the death of His human body, by the agony of His human Heart, He won back for us the Vision of His Father in heaven.

It is as His brothers and sisters we are admitted to that Vision. He lifts us up with Him. He has that Vision of His own right. He is the heir to the estate, He has an indefeasible right to that Possession: we enter in as sharing His privileges; through His kindness we also are sons of God, heirs to the Kingdom or Vision of God.

To accomplish that great purpose in our regard is the ambition of His Sacred Heart: and to know His Heart is to know what His plan is.

Now we can understand better, perhaps, why He loves the poor and desolate and suffering. It is the soul He is thinking of, the jewel of the soul hidden beneath the rags or the disease or the disgrace; the soul it is He values; and His Divine tenderness seeks to lift up and to save the soul no matter how repulsive the exterior may be.

Hence those that grow in love of Jesus and in knowledge of His Sacred Heart become like Him by sharing in that gentleness that is the characteristic virtue of His Heart. They

too - like Saint Joseph - become mirrors of His divine Patience.

Lover of Poverty

And they came with haste: and they found Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in the manger. - *Luke 2:16*

The stable of Bethlehem is indicative of the great secret of Christianity, for there we find on the one hand great poverty, cold, hunger, wretchedness; and on the other hand, God Himself made Man. So it is ever; the road to God is through lowliness, poverty, mortification, humility; it is to the meek and the simple He manifests His Divine Countenance; just as on Christmas night He drew the veil of heaven for the wondering eyes of a few poor shepherds.

If we upholster our minds with the rich cushions of pride and self-esteem and are afraid of the hard wood of humility and simple truthfulness, then Jesus leaves us to enjoy our comfort alone, without His company. He fares poorly; and if you would have the benefit of His conversation you must be content to share the hardships of His life; and it is in Jesus' company you find Joseph, and therefore in poverty and suffering and humiliation, and so you must lower yourself if you want to be admitted to His friendship. Saint Joseph teaches us to get rid of our pride - else we cannot be his friend, nor be at our ease with him - nor with Jesus.

The Shepherd Guests

If we wish to rise to God, to come near His Majesty and feel His influence upon our souls, we cannot do better than take as models the Bethlehem visitors to whom God Himself issued a special and honorable invitation to come into His Presence. These shepherds are Our Lord's select and

honored guests on the occasion of His birth. Let us study those visitors a little.

Their Qualities

Note three qualities in the shepherds. First their poverty. They had little of the world's goods; knew nothing of the royal wealth stored in the palaces of Caesarea or Rome; were simple, unlettered, detached men. And of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. Secondly, the simple faith that made them accept trustingly the Angel's message. This promptness of belief is a sign of their unworldliness. They asked for no sign but listened in all simplicity to the Divine Message and believed. Thirdly, their promptitude of action in corresponding with the Divine Light.

Immediately they say, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this word which the Lord hath revealed to us." They received no positive command to attend this royal levee. The Angel merely said: "I bring you splendid news that will make the world leap for joy, for the Saviour, the heavenly Messenger and Prophet who will set the world right, is born this very night a little distance away, and you can see Him if you will. I shall give you a sign by which you may distinguish Him from other babes. You shall find Him lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes." And then with startling suddenness the heavenly hosts are all about them singing God's praises.

The Delights of Paradise

The humiliation of the Second Person of the Trinity, His utter self-annihilation, is announced, and simultaneously is revealed the glory to which it will lead. The poor shepherds' souls are inundated for a brief period with the delights of paradise. Why? In order to strengthen them and prepare

them for the lowliness and poverty and meanness of Christ's Birth. Were it not for this glimpse of Paradise they would scarcely have been able to go to Bethlehem and kneel at the crib and adore the Babe. But God proportions the grace to the task. Here we have illustrated the truth on which Saint Paul so strongly insists: "Christ emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave and therefore God hath exalted Him and given Him a name above every other name."

Per Crucem ad Lucem

The glory of the Vision Beatific is the result of God's self-annihilation. Per crucem ad lucem! And this truth it is that lies at the root of the "spiritual life," a life, that is, lived intent on the things of the spirit rather than on the visible things of the universe. Other arts and sciences and professions are occupied with created material things. Even "abstract " sciences (such as mathematics) busy themselves about the qualities and accidents of material, extended things. Religion alone is occupied exclusively with supernatural interests. To enable the soul to sacrifice and turn away from the pleasures and interests of the world, a strong supernatural impulse is required and that impulse is supplied by such glimpses of the "brightness of God" as were vouchsafed to the shepherds.

Listening to God's Voice

Prayer should mean for us a similar visit of angels, a listening to heavenly harmonies and a glimpse of God's beauty.

During prayer God is treating us as He treated the shepherds, inviting us to leave our sheep and dogs and business cares, and come over to Bethlehem and find the Divine Infant. We should act as did the shepherds. We

should have a strong lively faith in God's guidance and providence. Against this trust in God we are often tempted, we are inclined sometimes to think He has forgotten us. Those that hold on stubbornly amidst the storm are they that do great things for Him.

Be Prompt

Then too we should be prompt in obeying the call. Now is the moment to act. The stars are hastening across the sky, the night is speeding away, morning will soon be here, and then perhaps the Babe will not be so easily found.

Promptness of action is just as necessary in corresponding with God's graces as alertness to see and utilize opportunities is necessary for successful business enterprise.

Model of Workmen

Mankind depends for existence on its workmen. As the workers of the world are, so will the world itself be. And therefore just as when Jesus wished to reform family life He began by restoring Woman to the high position of dignity from which man's evil passions had cast her down and for that purpose set before the world the Model of a perfect wife and mother in the Immaculate Virgin; so to continue and perfect His plan of social reform He lifted up human labor - which had become debased by contact with slavery - and restored it to its rightful place as one of the ennobling factors of life.

And the practical method adopted by Christ to teach the dignity of Labor was to choose a carpenter for His Foster

Father, to work under him and learn a trade whereby He Himself might earn His bread in the sweat of His brow. He

would come before the world as Jesus the Workman, the Carpenter's Son.

Servile Work

One of the strange phenomena of history is the contempt in which for long centuries manual toil was regarded by many civilised nations. This was one of the evil fruits of slavery. Servile work was work fit only for slaves.

Jesus taught that the value of time is its relation to eternity. Our actions here are a preparation for our existence hereafter. The important thing is not what you do - but how you do it, namely in accordance with the Will of Him who planned your existence and is helping you to work out your destiny.

Just as in an automobile factory or a newspaper office there is endless variety of occupations, but all tending to the accomplishment of one purpose, all working in subordination to the Manager or Editor; so in the busy factory of life each man has a different task allotted to him - but all must work in accordance with the Master's plan; and this conformity is secured by the practice of the Christian virtues.

The Workman's Virtues

Now Saint Joseph is the Model of workmen because in his life of toil he practised those Christian virtues so excellently; and the workman who wishes to make a right use of life and to travel safely on the road to God must imitate Saint Joseph in the practice of those virtues.

He must therefore be strictly just in his dealings with others - giving to every man his due; he must be chaste and temperate in home life. He must be prudent in managing his

affairs, avoiding extravagance and providing carefully for the maintenance and education of his children. Then too he must practise fortitude both in professing his faith and in facing the troubles of life. These are the four cardinal virtues. In dealing with employers and with his fellow-workers he must practise obedience and loyalty - be faithful to his word and faithful to his friends. Finally he must beware lest trials and disappointments - which come to every man - make him bitter or resentful, peevish or impatient, thus spoiling the happiness of home life and making his existence a burden to himself and others. And if poverty is his lot and he be forced to live in straitened circumstances, that too he will bear in a Christian spirit - out of love for Christ who was a poor man supporting Himself on the fruits of His toil.

Hence devotion to Saint Joseph should play a prominent part in the spiritual life of every Catholic family. Jesus Himself has set the example - since it was He and His holy Mother who first practised this devotion: they lavished on Saint Joseph all the wealth of affection, tenderness, and trust, which the most loving of sons and the most devoted of spouses could bestow. So that in loving and honoring Saint Joseph we are simply following in their footsteps.

About This EBook

The text of this file is taken from the booklet *Saint Joseph's Virtues*, by Father Albert Power, S.J., M.A., published by the Catholic Truth Society.

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